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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIRUT 000830

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NSC FOR ABRAMS/SINGH/MARCHESE/HARDING

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [MOPS](#) [PTER](#) [MASS](#) [LE](#) [SY](#)

SUBJECT: LEBANESE DEFMIN CONFIDENT ON NAHR AL-BARID FIGHT

Classified By: Jeffrey Feltman, Ambassador, per 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

11. (S) Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Elias Murr told Ambassador and DCM on 6/8 that GOL forces are committed to completing the operation at Nahar al-Barid against Fatah al-Islam insurgents; he estimated the LAF needs three to five more days. In recent fierce fighting, the LAF had killed 12 FAI suicide bombers. The LAF estimated it had killed 155 FAI fighters and captured six as of Friday night; Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) casualties were 48 killed (plus an additional seven on Saturday), 260 wounded. Murr claimed that the GOL has intercepted conversations that link FAI and the Syrian regime. The Ambassador urged Murr to share that information via intelligence channels and to give a releasable version to the UN for the Monday Security Council briefing on UNSCR 1559. Murr categorically denied that the GOL would purchase GOL sniper rifles, and he promised to give the USG access to munitions and other material seized at Nahr al-Barid and in raids elsewhere. Denying the press reports, Murr insisted that the Grad missiles seized from Hizballah recently remain in LAF custody. End summary.

FIERCE FIGHTING;
ANOTHER 3-5 DAYS NEEDED

12. (C) Meeting the Ambassador and DCM on 6/8, Murr described the situation in Nahr al-Barid as "Fallujah-like" house-to-house fighting, with the LAF destroying buildings as they go to take away sites FAI can use. Prime Minister Fouad Siniora's hope that the FAI fighters would surrender was proven unfounded by the fierceness of the fighting and by the fact that on Friday alone, LAF snipers shot dead 12 FAI terrorists equipped with explosive belts who intended suicide operations. Murr claimed that the LAF destroyed 180 buildings in one sweep and were, as of Friday night, a mere 60 meters from the Fatah al-Islam Samad Center and 200 meters from the Tawaniyya Center. Once these two FAI strongholds are taken, Murr said, the military operation will be less difficult and become more like a security operation. He at first estimated that the LAF needed another three days, amending it later to three to five days, for the major operations to be over.

13. (C) In terms of casualties, Murr estimated that the LAF has killed 155 FAI fighters since the operations began May 120. But, as FAI buries those bodies that fall on its side of the frontlines and some buildings were leveled with FAI fighters inside, Murr underscored that it is impossible to

know for sure. The LAF, as of Friday, had suffered 48 killed and 260 wounded. Updating the Ambassador by phone on Saturday night (6/9), Murr reported an additional seven LAF fatalities. While the Saturday battle was extremely tough and going very slowly, Murr said, the LAF was making steady progress.

FAI KILLED INCLUDE PALESTINIAN-LEBANESE
AND LEBANESE SUNNIS PARDONED IN 2005

14. (C) Asked about the identify of those killed, Murr confirmed that, among the FAI bodies recovered by the LAF, some were Lebanese citizens of Palestinian origin who had benefited from a 1994 Syria-directed "nationalization" program. Others were from the Dinniya extremist gang that had attacked the LAF in January 2000 but who were pardoned and released from prison in the July 2005 parliamentary amnesty (the amnesty that also included the release of Lebanese Forces leader Samir Geagea). On Saturday night, Murr reported that the LAF no longer is finding any foreign fighters, only Lebanese citizens (including those of Palestinian origin).

15. (C) Murr stated that he had visited the area three times in the past three days. LAF morale, he reported, was high and better than at the beginning of the operation. He has directed LAF commanders to attempt to capture insurgents for interrogation at the end of the operation, rather than kill them. Ambassador urged that the LAF seek to seize arms and materiel that USG could help analyze to determine their source; Murr promised to do so.

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CLAIMS OF INTERCEPTS
LINKING SYRIA AND FAI

16. (S) Murr claimed the GOL now had information, including an audio recording, linking Syria to insurgent operations in Lebanon. A phone call from Syrian intelligence official Assaf Shawkat's office to the FAI terrorists was intercepted, Murr stated. The Ambassador urged that the GOL to make this information available at the UN for the meeting on Lebanon on Monday, June 11. In a subsequent phone conversation with the Ambassador on Saturday evening (6/9), Murr said that the GOL now had additional intercepts of Syrian officials instructing FAI to fight to the death. The Ambassador urged Murr to share this information through intelligence channels, which Murr promised to do, and, if possible, provide releasable information to the United Nations. Murr said that the GOL would prepare a report for the UN outlining evidence of Syrian interference in the Nahr al-Barid fight and elsewhere.

HIZBALLAH'S GRAD MISSILES:
GUARDED BY LAF; WON'T BE RETURNED

17. (C) On other issues, Ambassador asked about press reports that the GOL had returned to Hizballah Grad missiles that Lebanon's State Security organization had seized from Hizballah in the Biqa' Valley a few days earlier. Denying the press reports, Murr was emphatic that the LAF kept the missiles and would not hand them over to Hizballah. He insisted that they were at an LAF storage facility and even registered in the LAF property management system. The Ambassador urged Murr to allow USG access to the rockets, so that we could attempt to trace the origin and production dates. Murr agreed (although no specific arrangements were made at this meeting), but he said that, unlike the February LAF seizure of a Hizballah weapons truck, there were no markings of any kind on the missiles or their packaging.

18. (C) The Ambassador raised the rumored interest of the GOL in purchasing Russian sniper rifles, noting to Murr that

such a purchase would immediately unravel support for the LAF within the USG. Murr confirmed that Russians had offered to sell sniper rifles to the GOL, but he insisted that the GOL would not pursue this. Like others, he thought that the recent string of bombings were intended to send messages more than cause injury. He agreed with the Ambassador that Hizballah had been particularly quiet during the Nahr al-Barid operation, theorizing that they are waiting to determine how best to use the outcome for their advantage. Commenting on the arrest a few days earlier in Bar Elias of three men believed to be associated with al-Qaida, Murr said (without explaining how he came to this conclusion) that the two Syrians in the group had been in Lebanon for about two months.

FELTMAN